

SEROV AND THE NEW SOVIET SECRET POLICE

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Since April 1954, when he assumed the ministerial post of Chairman of the Committee on State Security (KGB), General Ivan Serov has been the most dreaded figure in the Soviet Union. As head of the Soviet security (i.e., secret) police, which this job made him, he has also been considered one of the most powerful of the Kremlin hierarchy. As a result the world, and probably the Soviet public also, was much surprised when a single sentence on the back page of the 9 December 1958 issue of Izvestia announced that he had been relieved as head of the KGB "in connection with his transfer to other work."

The omission of any reference to his new assignment led to widespread speculation that Serov had gone to join Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich and Bulganin in disgrace, that Khrushchev had once again succeeded in eliminating a possible and potentially dangerous rival. Serov admittedly had never wielded as much power as had his predecessor Beria (executed in December 1953), for the secret police, upon being reorganized as the KGB in March 1954, had been stripped of many of the powers enjoyed by Beria's NKVD. Nevertheless, Serov's KGB remained the single most powerful apparatus in the Soviet Union, excluding only the Armed Forces.

It now appears that Serov has not, as was first thought, been purged or downgraded but has rather been assigned to an even more important position—a position which can only be viewed as evidence of Khrushchev's indisputable trust in him. The Kremlin itself has not yet indicated the new post assumed by Serov, but other reports emanating from the Soviet Union suggest what this assignment is.

Throughout the Soviet Union, so-called "volunteer workers' militia" detachments are currently being formed, with members recruited from the most reliable workers. Organized into military formations and bearing arms, these workers ostensibly are to serve as civilian auxiliaries to the regular

police (militia). For the present these "volunteer" militiamen will be identified only by red armbands, but eventually they are to be uniformed or wear badges.

These elite Soviet workers who are already "privileged" to devote most of their leisure hours to Party activities and attendance at political indoctrination lectures, are now being permitted to "volunteer" to spend additional hours--without pay--serving as policemen.

According to information thus far available, the detachments are to be commanded by persons elected by the workers themselves. However, if these elections are conducted, as they no doubt will be, in the normal Soviet fashion (i.e., by what the Communists euphemistically term "democratic centralism"), the unit commanders will be appointed by the top command echelons of the new organization.

The announced purpose of these workers' militia detachments is to assist the regular police in the enforcement of the campaign against drunkards and hooligans. This implies that the police have been unable to cope with lawlessness and that, to prevent a breakdown of law and order, they require assistance, which the workers' militia is to provide.

Such a conclusion is obviously untenable. The Soviet Union is today, as it always has been, a highly disciplined police state in which any violation of government or Party rules and regulations results in immediate arrest and, not infrequently, deportation.

The real purpose of the new militia can be discerned in the fact that its members are to have the task of preserving order on streets and public transportation vehicles and in stores and clubs, and of apprehending "anti-social" elements. In the USSR the term "anti-social" can mean whatever the Party leaders wish it to mean. In particular, it is applied to anything which suggests opposition to the dictatorship of the Communist Party.

Thus, what apparently is taking place is the creation of a new nation-wide secret police organization, composed of the most trusted Party members among the workers, which will spy on the Soviet citizen wherever he may be.

It is the organization and command of this new secret police apparatus which is believed to be Serov's new assignment. Having abundant proof of his loyalty, Khrushchev apparently decided that no one was better qualified for the job than Serov.

Although the senior police official to survive Beria's downfall, Serov has been associated with Khrushchev since the late 1930's when he served as security chief for the Ukraine at the same time that the present Soviet Premier was the Party leader there. His devotion to the Communist Party and his ability and willingness to crush its opponents were further proved during World War II when he carried out the purge of nationalists in the then newly-occupied Baltic States. It was Serov who signed the notorious Secret Order No. 001223, under which more than 600,000 Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians were executed or deported to the slave labor camps of Siberia.

The reason for the creation of a new secret police organization in the Soviet Union remains obscure. Some observers, however, have conjectured that the internal Party conflict now going on has led Khrushchev to conclude that for the safety of his own position he requires the support of a reliable instrument of surveillance and repression which will be loyal to him personally. Serov is now undertaking to create this instrument.

The present KGB clearly will not serve Khrushchev's purpose, since its loyalty is to the Communist Party as a whole. With the semi-autonomous police empire built up by Beria and his predecessors having been converted with considerable difficulty over the last four years into a completely Party-controlled apparatus, the anti-Khrushchev Party factions would not knowingly again expose themselves to danger by permitting Khrushchev to create such a personal police force. The politically astute Premier, however, appears to have avoided suspicion and gained Party approval for his plans by terming the new organization a civilian auxiliary to the regular police. By the time the true nature of the so-called workers' militia becomes apparent, it will be too late for the Premier's opponents to do anything to stop it.

If Khrushchev's loyal lieutenant, Serov, carries out his new assignment efficiently (and there is no reason to believe he will not) the Party, the Soviet public and the world will awake one morning to find themselves confronted by a new set of initials or acronyms to join those which had receded into history--Cheta, OGPU, NKVD, MVD and KGB. But one thing is certain. Whatever it may be called, Khrushchev's new secret police organization will be exactly that. The Soviet citizenry will have little reason to contemplate it with anything but fear.